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AUTHOR Cohen, Marlene C.
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ABSTRACT

The noncredit teaching areas of community colleges are significant and growing. Community colleges' close links to their communities plus their ability and desire to service a variety of student needs allow them to provide innovative and specific on-campus noncredit courses, such as specialized business courses. Communication faculty have the potential for developing noncredit communication skills courses, and even greater opportunities blossom when the communication faculty member can work directly with the client to recommend and to develop appropriate courses. However, flexibility is needed to interact with noncredit staff and administration in ways that bridge the credit/noncredit gap. The benefits to the community college of faculty involvement, particularly communication faculty, in this partnership are as follows: (1) increasing enrollment through noncredit courses; (2) providing faculty with more experience by teaching a diversity of students; (3) strengthening of the quality of faculty members' teaching methods; (4) increasing the college's interaction with community residents and businesses; and (5) closer linking of credit and noncredit areas. Developing new noncredit training courses taps the creativity, specific expertise and interests of the faculty and helps eliminate the burnout that comes with the routine of always teaching the same courses. (JK)

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EXPANDING THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE PROFESSOR: TEACHING CREDIT AND NONCREDIT COURSES TO FULFILL THE CONTRACT

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MARLENE C. COHEN,
PRINCE GEORGE'S COMMUNITY COLLEGE, MD

Paper Presented at 73rd Annual Meeting of SPEECH COMMUNICATION ASSOCIATION, Boston MA, November 8, 1987

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During the 1986-87 academic year I had the opportunity to teach interpersonal skills to senior citizens, communication skills in the workplace to managers, public speaking skills to women members of the county Chamber of Commerce and overcoming speech anxiety techniques to county residents.

While this doesn't seem like an atypical itinerary for a communication professor who works overtime at consulting, what makes my experience different is that these training activities fulfilled part of my teaching contract last year.

In 1985 I served as a liaison between the Department of Speech Communication and Theatre of Prince George's Community College and the college's Contract Training and Community Services offices. In that role, I was able to develop a variety of interesting noncredit courses for the college, some offered as open enrollment, others as training for specific client groups. Meanwhile I increased my interest in teaching noncredit by determining a way to incorporate it into my faculty contract responsibilities.

In a paper presented at the Eastern Communication Association convention in 1986 (ERIC Report # ED 269 830), I discussed the courses and teaching style appropriate for a successful transition to noncredit teaching. In this paper, with the benefit of additional hindsight, I will identify what I believe to be the opportunities uniquely available to community college communication faculty members who wish to develop and teach noncredit courses for the community college.

The following issues will be discussed:

- The proliferation of business/government and community college partnerships,
- The unique role in this partnership for a communication faculty member,
- The benefits to the community college of faculty involvement, particularly communication faculty, in this partnership,
- The benefits of involvement to the communication faculty member.

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The proliferation of business/government and community college partnerships

In 1984-85, the 1222 accredited community, technical and junior colleges in the United States enrolled approximately 4.8 million students in credit courses and 4 million in noncredit courses, according the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges' (AACJC) and Association of Community College Trustees' publication KEEPING AMERICA WORKING THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS WITH SMALL BUSINESS (1987). Those who teach in community colleges are well aware that noncredit areas of their institutions are significant and growing. The potential is great for providing on-campus noncredit courses on communication topics. Also growing is the development of community college partnerships with government and business, and the consistent opportunity to provide specialized training for specific clients. One illustration is the national "Keeping America Working" effort, which includes programs funded by The Sears-Roebuck Foundation and by the Minority Business Development Agency of the U.S. Department of Commerce. Great diversity in community college training has been stimulated through that program. Some examples:

Triton College IL trains die casting and manufacturing engineers,

Metropolitan Technical Community College NE trains a cross-section of Omaha's public sector employees,

El Paso Community College TX has established a Small Business Resource Center which trains small business owners,

Miami Dade Community College FL proves management classes which area money-lending agencies require of new start-up minority business owners,

Iowa area community colleges cooperate with the state to offer attractive packages of training and benefits to new workers for businesses which will relocate or expand in Iowa.

KEEPING AMERICA WORKING THROUGH PARTNERSHIPS WITH SMALL BUSINESS (1987) argues that "[c]ommunity, technical, and junior colleges...are doing for an information age what the land-grant university has done for the agricultural and industrial eras. They have become a major national training resource, equipped with the necessary resources, faculty talent and experience..."

Community colleges' close link to their communities plus their ability and desire to service a variety of student needs make them appropriate choices to provide new and innovative training. And the potential for that training seems greater than ever.

The unique role a communication faculty member can play

Those who teach technical skills have long been involved with the type of training I have discussed. But it is likely that at most community colleges the academic course faculty and particularly the humanities or arts and sciences faculty have been unassociated. The common division of campuses into credit and noncredit areas creates a wall between credit-side faculty members and noncredit trainers. If my campus is typical, the wall is strengthened by prevailing attitudes about the undereducated trainers headquartered in one building and the pompous, demanding faculty who occupy the others.

Yet it is logical that the trainers and the faculty often could be one in the same, and that communication professors are among the most likely to serve in such roles.

All the above examples, from engineers to public sector employees to new small business owners, could benefit from communication training, be it public speaking skills, persuasive strategies or interpersonal skills to build teams in the office. Further, as communication strategists ourselves, we should be more adept than most of our fellow faculty at developing courses suited to each client, adapting to different audiences' needs and expectations.

What a noncredit staff particularly needs is a resource person in a given discipline who can identify what can and cannot be taught, how to package it and, in some cases, what the client needs but does not know he/she needs. A client may mean many different things when he/she says the organization needs "communication training."

There is also great potential in marketing communication courses to organizations which thus far have sought only technical training. That business places high value on employees having effective communication skills is well documented. But contract training personnel at community colleges cannot market everything, and may not even know the potential of their colleges' communication faculty. That is why a communication department liaison is so necessary.

Thus the task for a communication faculty member is not merely teaching communication in other formats. Developing noncredit offerings in communication means analyzing a groups' needs, creating courses of the appropriate length with the appropriate topics and methods to convey them, then teaching by effectively adapting to the group. Then it is necessary to market the courses developed to college contract training personnel as well as to likely clients. Participating in the process from start to finish is highly educational to the instructor and provides excellent opportunity to assess and to modify for subsequent sessions.

For community college communication instructors who often teach a range of courses from interpersonal to international student pronunciation to debate, being called upon to teach in a variety of communication areas is nothing new. I am probably typical of those who enjoy being such a generalist in the field.

In summary, though many subject area faculty could benefit from brainstorming their potential for business, government and community training, communication faculty have vast potential for developing communication skills courses. It is not enough for faculty members to be available to teach a noncredit course. Greater opportunities blossom when the communication faculty member can work directly with the client to recommend and to develop appropriate courses.

Adapting is also needed to interact with noncredit staff and administration in ways that bridge the credit/noncredit gap; a strong communicator should find the task challenging, not insurmountable.

As I gathered information on my campus to determine the feasibility of linking credit and noncredit teaching, I became aware of many attitudinal barriers, as we debaters call them, that must be overcome for credit/noncredit teaching to blend effectively.

The noncredit staff fears faculty intrusion into its blossoming program. Given the faculty's significant role on the campus, the fear is that their involvement will lead to their control.

Meanwhile, some faculty on the credit side of the college look down on the noncredit side. Some assume the "academic approach" to teaching is always the best, and resent the demand to "give them what they want" in laymen's language and short, compact sessions without the power to pass and fail.

Those who teach negotiation skills may be called upon to put theory into practice. It seems essential that the faculty member who ventures into noncredit mediate between the two areas of the college in a positive way. Ideally one faculty member should be designated and recognized as a liaison by both areas.

Because much time is needed to talk with clients, to develop and to market, the faculty member should be given release time. If one is only compensated for the hours in the classroom then either much work is being provided for free or faculty will not choose to pursue this avenue.

The benefits to the community college of faculty involvement, particularly communication faculty, in this partnership

The most obvious benefit to a community college is that it can experience increased enrollment through noncredit courses by making better use of its own faculty. Whether credit or noncredit hours, increased enrollment benefits everyone on campus. At Prince George's Community College, it was not a difficult recording-keeping alteration for both the Department of Speech Communication and Theatre and noncredit areas to have the course hours recorded as part of their enrollment figures, encouraging this cooperative venture.

Additionally I extended to the Department of Speech Communication and Theatre the combining of credit and noncredit students in the same on-campus classroom. Because enrollment credit is given to the Department for both types of students, the combined enrollment allowed the teaching of a night section of a public speaking course that would otherwise have been cancelled for lack of students.

Because faculty members are trained and experienced in teaching, their methods of teaching may strengthen the quality of noncredit courses currently offered. Also faculty are experienced in teaching a diversity of students in the same classroom.

If it is fair to assume that some communication faculty at each community college will become involved in outside consulting, the college stands to benefit from brokering that consulting, instead of competing with it.

As faculty provides noncredit courses for the college, it also increases the college's interaction with community residents and businesses. In my experience this also becomes an opportunity to market the credit programs to new audiences.

A final benefit to the college of faculty developing and teaching noncredit courses is that it does more closely link credit and noncredit areas of the college. It can only be a positive step if more employees of the college perceive their commonality of purpose.

The benefits of involvement to the communication faculty member

Developing new noncredit training courses taps the creativity, specific expertise and interests of full and part-time faculty. At the community college, faculty teach primarily introductory courses and seldom get opportunities to teach specific communication topics in depth. As I began developing courses my colleagues and I realized that this was an opportunity to teach in our own areas of particular interest, such as cultural communication differences, speech apprehension or family

communication. Preventing faculty burnout and routine certainly are important benefits to stretching the role of faculty members into the noncredit area.

For those seeking consulting experience, it can be provided without the demanding task of marketing one's own business. The college's existing involvement with many large organizations provides a great opportunity to develop corporate training skills or to teach a specialized course for the first time.

At my community college, and probably many others, the option of teaching noncredit courses has always existed. But in addition to lacking awareness of the possibilities, faculty were probably discouraged by the poor pay schedule for such overtime teaching. Given the standard consulting rates, why train clients for the college at $20 per hour?

Since Prince George's Community College had already had occasion to use faculty for large training projects, it was a logical next step to begin allowing faculty to combine short noncredit course hours to fulfill part of the faculty contracted teaching hours. Scheduling is not simple, but the option of receiving regular salary for noncredit training makes it financially appealing.

Because contracts can develop or cancel with little advance notice, I found I had to plan more than enough courses to be sure to fulfill the yearly contract. I taught a variety of short non-credit courses, making sure I reached a total of at least 45 contact hours. For the purposes of my teaching contract, the 45 hours were treated as equal to teaching a 45-hour, three-credit semester course, thus reducing my required class load by one class.

There is no question that it is more effort to develop and to teach different, short courses, often held at different locations, than to teach another section of an existing course. Some would not welcome a switch to the noncredit classroom. But for those who would, it provides wonderful variety in the teaching schedule.

I have no doubt that I continue to learn much more about my subject matter by adapting it to different audiences. The senior citizens gave me a new perspective on speech anxiety, linked to the fear of not being taken seriously; the sheriff's deputies caused me to focus on the life-and-death issues linked to their understanding of others' nonverbal communication.

Each new training group adds a new dimension to the subject matter. That addition not only renews the subject matter for me, but it provides me with current, specific examples and perspectives to take back to the credit classroom.

I have no doubt that watching my students who were 92 and 93 years old walking hand in hand into my senior citizens class taught me a dimension of interpersonal communication that I could not have discovered in more conventional teaching.